The Origin of Ordinary Tragedy

The Loss of Control

Disorder is the loss of control over reality, understanding reality as an image from a point of view. This is equivalent to stating that, strictly speaking, disorder is the loss of control of someone over themselves.

Order can be defined in two ways, and consequently, disorder as well. It's curious that a brief inquiry naturally leads to the result that both definitions can be reduced to one, and yet, our reason seems determined to deny this.

The first way of understanding order is thinking of it as a disposition of parts that we judge to be correct according to an end we assume or that is evident. This is functionality. This definition would conceive of order as the pursuit of purpose, or teleological. On the other hand, although they are essentially the same thing, one could search in cognition and its mysteries for the second way of understanding order. We see it as a disposition that allows us to predict the unfolding of the universe. That universe can mean both a small portion of reality and the universe in its entirety, containing everything, being everything.

Order is control. It doesn't matter which path we choose to follow.

This second definition raises the problem of the image within the subject, in its underlying theory, functioning as a map of a reality for which we only have maps. Only maps, I said. We must realize that this order is within us and has a very clear purpose: to understand and interact efficiently with reality. Everything happens inside and only inside our subjectivities, which have as a guarantee of reality an intersubjective link that we can always (and should) distrust.

Therefore, when we observe the universe, we see order when we understand that some form of ordering entity, intentionally or not, has put things in their place. And the place of things, judged by a purpose achieved, allows the transition to a higher state based on the arrangement given to matter. The organs of a living being are there for it to live; and they live because the living being lives. They are like a choir where one off-key member causes everyone to fail. Life is necessarily a consequence of order. Not of one order but of many functioning in coordination.

When we take the role of the ordering entity, we do so for aesthetic, moral reasons, or out of necessity. The latter, necessity, is the most horrible and cruel force that a human being could encounter. Necessity turns man into an animal. It is the complete opposite of the ideal state of balance, clean and elevated, that we are fortunate enough to aspire to.

We need to adapt quickly and well to any avatar of reality, and for that, we must order it to predict it. This impulse towards a position of strategic prediction could give us great advantages against the constant siege of necessity.

Therefore, it is also about creating an arrangement of parts aimed at a purpose every time we try to understand in order to predict. And that purpose is to adapt and react to the eventualities we know we are exposed to. We are afraid.

Note that I have deliberately left aside aesthetic order and intentional moral order because they are simpler than order through necessity. Both obey mutable and perishable sets of values.

Order, then, is control. By overcoming the layers and layers of foolishness that the promoters of pastist culture (frivolous, irrelevant, vulgar) have placed in our spirits, we find a profound connection between ordering and controlling; by arranging parts, we design, we project. And that's exactly what we do with the image of reality (imago mundi) that we elaborate in our reason.

We are moved by an order that we carry with us everywhere and that we blindly try to impose on reality, always understanding that the motor of this need for order is, for the sake of circularity, the goddess Ananké. Why do we understand that we must form a home, for example? What reasons drive us to kill our freedom? We are incomplete and vulnerable beings, weak. Not to the attack of a wild animal. Not to the destructive whim of the wind and rain. It's unlikely that you or I would find ourselves in that situation, admit it. There may be people who do, but you know that you will probably have a roof over your head and a meal tomorrow. We are surrounded by the mere possibility of solitude, inactivity, failure. And all this, illusorily, we want to avoid by ordering our lives, directing them toward the end of avoiding being left alone, inactive, and defeated. Of all the evils we can foresee in an unwanted future, solitude is the worst. And it is because we know that, just as at the beginning of life, at the end, we might not be able to fend for ourselves. Life tells us: if you're lucky and don't die, you'll become a dependent old person, pitiful.

Solitude is worse than poverty, since even someone who is very poor can receive help from someone who cares for them. But not necessarily someone wealthy will have anyone who cares for them in their final years. They may buy company, but it will always be a commercial, interested relationship: prostitution.

So, we begin to direct the order of our lives towards goals such as getting a job, a partner, a house, and all the connected needs that we will soon see conspiring, intimately linking with each other, ignoring us. Commitments intensify because, foolishly, we believe they perpetuate relationships. Commitments imprison us but also provide a sense of security. An illusory security that at least gives us the right to fantasize that things would have to go terribly wrong for someone to throw a life project full of commitments in the trash. And the deepest commitment –or at least it should be– is the child.

The need for order is also present in the importance we give to theory. Theory is only generalization for anticipation; that is, strategic prediction. When we cling to a theory, which is an order superimposed on the map of reality we have and that is reality for us, and we load it with the best of our emotional fanaticism, we clearly demonstrate our weakness. This happens not only in the field of psychology or sociology, but the persistent, stubborn, blind superimposition of a way of reading reality will inevitably

define any mediocre mentality. Good and bad are distributed in the world and give us directions for lives that otherwise would lack purpose.

But how can we know? How could we realize that our motivations are a form of fanaticism and the product of our spiritual weakness? A good symptom to identify is the uncritical acceptance of anything proposed to us. I picture a diner with blindfolded eyes who takes whatever is placed on their plate and puts it in their mouth. And worse, the analogy reaches the depths of infamy and baseness; the diner laughs and says they like it, either because they are ordinary (and honest) or because they are cynical (and lying to us).

No matter how hard I try, I can't discern which of the two disgusts me more.

We all want to order. In fact, this text is an attempt to order. Putting things into writing is a very beautiful and effective way to do so. It forces us to structure our thoughts, to move from sensations to language and make them communicable. Of course, within the limits that the language itself imposes on us. That's why it's not uncommon that, in order to escape the initial order that the linguistic possibilities already constitute, we must resort to twisting and expanding it with neologisms or improper uses.

Rereading what I have written so far, I've been left with the unpleasant feeling, which I now also associate with the communicability of ideas and the inherent possibility of intentional or unintentional failure, that someone could have understood that I'm attacking traditional family values as if I were trying to adhere to the dominant trend. Such things seem so trivial to me that they are very far from my interests.

I will speak plainly, without beating around the bush: the origin of ordinary human tragedy is the awareness of individual mortality and the loss of control over one's existence, from which the terror of solitude and the need to create securities arise. The origin of this tragedy is weakness, incompleteness, and the anxiety to attain and maintain certain conditions of existence that we have learned to accept unreflectively as happiness.

I said it is ordinary, and it is because we commonly lack the courage or elegance to appeal to silence and make our own path without needing others. We prefer, of course, to sink into the sea of vulgarity, into the sticky inertia of customs, rituals, and appearances. We laugh and ask for more of the mush we've placed on our plates without knowing what it was.

The Heart of the Beast

I will pursue ordinary tragedy to its den, to find the very point at which it is born. I will begin with a confession: the reflex action is a mystery to me. How our body, for example, generates a movement of the leg when it is struck in a certain spot on the knee; how the throat involuntarily churns if an object touches a certain area; how the hairs on the arm rise when an ice cube travels across our abdomen. The reflex is something we do but without the will to do it; something our body does without us. Without us, who are our body. That is, something we do without us. We set ourselves aside, and we do it. And we do it in us.

In some people, there is an evident reflex action that, if it were not so pathetic, would be almost ridiculous: they immediately submit themselves to beauty. The will is annulled by the need to approach and possess that beauty. It is, above all, a mere instinctive reaction. It's not even, as someone might think, an instinctive drive toward reproduction. These people don't want to reproduce; they don't think about having a child. In truth, they only have in mind the possibility of enjoying beauty. And don't think it necessarily refers to beauty to admire, but rather a beauty to be tasted, touched, consumed. It is need expressing itself, especially in that irrational impulse of momentary possession and showing that one has the means to enjoy another body. Of course, except for strange exceptions, it's not the desire to literally devour another person. Although, it doesn't take much imagination to suppose that, taken to the extreme, this impulse would necessarily end in cannibalism.

This need is fleeting. The immediate desire is a perfume that quickly dissipates, and all that remains is a vague memory. For this reason, understanding the foundation of a relationship between two people as the impulse to devour the other, metaphorically speaking, is a bad idea. It would also be a bad idea if it were literal. Once devoured, we would no longer have anyone to love. Nor anyone to eat.

Perhaps it's hard to imagine for someone who hasn't lived it.

On the other hand, we have the strategists, who are positioned at the opposite end of the metaphorical cannibals. The strategists look at the cannibals and smile. "Bite", they say, "bite the bait, we are on the other side of the rod". Thus, what truly characterizes strategists is a fantasy deeply ingrained in their personalities; the fantasy that they will live forever. A fantasy, moreover, reinforced by the idea that life, all of life, is some kind of puzzle game; a chess match where one plays not against death, as in that old movie, but against life itself to get the most out of it.

Strategists, who are not only strategists when looking for a partner (which, let's agree, must first and foremost be a good partner and be mentally and physically healthy to face the obstacles they will encounter in their project), but also strategists when studying a career, choosing a job, buying a car, selecting friends, finding discounts... strategists are obsessed with commercializing their time. I mean, for them, it's only worthwhile to engage in activities that will provide economic benefits. Leisure time must be minimized, and even in those moments, they will be thinking about the strategy to find some benefit from the moves to be made.

Of course, they will never achieve happiness. And they won't because anything they achieve will always feel insufficient. All their efforts, and they know it, though they would never admit it, stem from a fundamental incompleteness. They will be alert to the flaws of their partners in this obstacle course that is life, where they will never find peace, nor will they allow anyone to "stay still" and commit the supreme sin of feeling complete and peaceful with what they have.

I want to pause and talk about something that might seem unrelated to what I have been saying, but which at a very deep level explains this problem, giving it a twist that I find interesting.

It is commonly said with sufficient self-assurance that a person who decides to end their life is cowardly. It is also often heard that one must have a lot of courage to make such a decision. People tend to lean toward one of these two opposing opinions. Of course, with nuances that are related to the level of sanction they may face when expressing their opinion honestly. Many people truly won't say what they believe about it for fear of being wrong. It amuses me that someone might think they could be wrong about a personal opinion, which is a value judgment. There is simply no possibility of error. What there is, is the possibility of being unable to substantiate the response or making someone angry.

Regarding the issue, I believe that one must have a lot of courage to face life, but I also think that many do so out of cowardice concerning death; both in relation to the moment of dying and to what might follow after death. Anyone is obliged to face it.

Thus, the people who play strategy with life will say that they are brave because they don't settle for what they have, they want to improve, they want to evolve, to become someone, to gain respect and admiration from others. They will shout that they are brave, but in truth, they are insecure and needy, miserable. On the other hand, those who do not aspire to improve their material existence run the risk of being dead without knowing it. Of course, this death is a death seen from the outside, as they can feel very comfortable growing algae in their joints, lying on their couch.

If one thinks about this strategic way of acting, one will understand why for many people, retirement is nothing less than a death sentence. They will keep working because it is the only thing that makes them feel useful. Not working is dying.

Both the nature of metaphorical cannibals, which is immediate perishability, disillusionment, and certain frustration, and that of strategists, which is identical to the mentality of a poor greyhound chasing a mechanical hare, will lead to unhappiness. The strategist's bravery is merely a way of beautifying the impossible-to-fill void that accompanies them everywhere.

I must also point out something else. Something especially painful, I admit. It is the romanticization of human connections; a kind of blindness quite widespread that "spices up" relationships and makes us completely vulnerable to manipulation. Romanticism as a position towards life is nothing more than surrendering body and soul to the absolute. The absolute is the sea, the starry sky, the imposing forces of nature, but it is also death, the perpetual pain of a loss, and love; but a love that transcends all rational arbitrariness; it possesses us and manipulates us as it pleases; a love that is nothing more than

God or Fate punishing our arrogance as if anything we attempted were only small and unstable towers of Babel.

Thus, both those who only care about the flesh and those who only care about the project will serve us —those of us who romanticize connections— since we will fatally lose control over our own actions. This romanticization, ladies and gentlemen, is nothing but another origin for ordinary tragedy.

But how? How can something like this happen to us? I am told. Romanticization is everywhere; in literature, in music, on television... from within, there is no more justifiable reason to live than surrendering to the infinite; neither flesh nor project are as valuable as the infinite promised to us by real love.

It is not my intention to complicate things, but that of "real love" is a problem in itself because some people give the adjective a meaning exactly opposite to what others give it. "Real", modifying "love", slyly asks us who we are; strategists, with their feet firmly on the ground and the clouds of the sky far from their heads, will say that "real love" is that which cares about the everyday, which understands that people are imperfect, and that it is, above all, patience, sacrifice of personal interests. Others, with their heads firmly in the clouds and constantly slipping in the mud of the manipulator's miseries, will say that "real love" has nothing to do with the everyday, patience, or domestic sacrifice, but with dying for another person if a cursed angel came down from heaven and, wielding a sword, said: "either her, or you".

Why "tragedy"? Why "ordinary"?

In antiquity, there was a subgenre of dramatic literature called "tragedy". Tragedy showed the fall from grace of an outstanding character, an exceptional one; the tragic hero. Homeric poems and epics from all times and places also sang of excellence. Perhaps since the literature of the Golden Age and the picaresque novel, the hero has been a fool.

What is tragic is the inevitable and fiercely unfortunate. What is ordinary is what happens to us because we don't have enough willpower to impose ourselves on reality. Thus, when we follow paths already tread by millions of footsteps, when we fall again and again into those common and lamentable schemes offered by a reality worn out to the point of nausea, we are ordinary, vulgar, common. It is the same ordinariness of complaining about the humidity at a bus stop or the price hike of bell peppers. It is such a lamentable position towards life that I would not hesitate to label it disrespectful to oneself.

The pastiche no longer amuses me. Neither does the pathetic nor the parody. We have reached a point where we must consider making a leap and imagining ourselves in a higher state of existence where we no longer disrespect ourselves. It is difficult, I know, but ask yourself in your daily life to what extent you are being ordinary.

I sincerely believe that one way not to fall into ordinariness is by breaking the link with the constant commercialization of available time and the unbearable multiplication of projects. One day, life will say that it is over, and it's over. We are not immortal. We should sit down quietly, look around, and try to

feel that we have achieved many things, if things are what matter to us. Happiness is everywhere, it's just that we are not really interested in it.

We should start by seeing. Firstly, that we don't move among mannequins of flesh. We can't consume the other. The other has their own problems and needs. If the need to savor sensory pleasures is what orders our life and controls us, our existence will be like those amusement park games, where we get into an electric car and constantly crash into others. And on the other hand, if what orders our life and controls us is the project, we will walk blindly among projects, forgetting that we are human beings; we will look for partners, we will have future caregivers in our children, we will buy things to leave them later. And that will be all.

I don't want to end this article with a moral judgment. I have no authority to judge anyone about what they do or don't do with their life. But it pains me to see how many sick people there are in the world, with that horrible hole in their chest that forces them to take sleeping pills at night; and during the day, needing one, two, three, four cups of coffee to keep going.

Beaten people, functioning like machines; broken and repeating themselves, creaking. Looking for relief in yoga or alcohol; secretly smoking marijuana in the work bathrooms. People proud of buying expensive phones for their children; children who despise them, who mistreat them in front of others. Empty people who invent a spiritual life full of pseudoscientific knowledge, scandalous ignorance, talking about parental constellations and the need to read books on metaphysics, angels, and stoicism for beginners.

In the middle of all this garbage floating in a sea of urine, a castaway hugs the only palm tree on his tiny island, looks up, and sees a coconut. Then he says, "I am happy".